

Early Modern Spanish

Early Modern Spanish (also called *classical Spanish* or *Golden Age Spanish*, especially in literary contexts) is the variant of Spanish used between the end of the fifteenth century and the end of the seventeenth century, marked by a series of phonological and grammatical changes that transformed Old Spanish into Modern Spanish.

Notable changes from Old Spanish to Early Modern Spanish include: (1) a readjustment of the sibilants (including their devoicing and changes in their place of articulation), (2) the phonemic merger known as *yeísmo*, (3) the rise of new second-person pronouns, (4) the emergence of the "se lo" construction for the sequence of third-person indirect and direct object pronouns, and (5) new restrictions on the order of clitic pronouns.

Early Modern Spanish corresponds to the period of Spanish colonization of the Americas, and thus it forms the historical basis of all varieties of New World Spanish. Meanwhile, Judeo-Spanish preserves some archaisms of Old Spanish that disappeared from the rest of the variants, such as the presence of voiced sibilants and the maintenance of the phonemes /ʃ/ and /ʒ/.

Early Modern Spanish, however, was not uniform throughout the Spanish-speaking regions of Spain. Each change has its own chronology and, in some cases, geography. Slightly different pronunciations existed simultaneously. The Spanish spoken in Toledo was taken as the "best" variety and was different from that of Madrid.^[1]

Early Modern Spanish	
Native to	Spain
Era	15th–17th century
Language family	Indo-European <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Italic ▪ Romance ▪ Early Modern Spanish
Writing system	Latin
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	—
Glottolog	None

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Phonology

From the late 16th century to the mid-17th century, the voiced sibilants /z/, /ʒ/, /ʒ/ lost their voicing and merged with their respective voiceless counterparts: laminal /s/, apical /s/, and palatal /ʃ/, resulting in the phonemic inventory shown below:

		Labial	Alveolar		Palatal	Velar	Glottal
			Laminal	Apical			
Obstruent	voiceless	p	t		tʃ	k	
	voiced	b	d			g	
Voiceless fricative		f	ʂ	ʂ	ʃ		(h)
Nasal		m	n		n		
Tap			r				
Trill			r				
Approximant	lateral		l		ʎ		
	central				j		

- The phoneme /h/ (from Old Spanish initial /f/) progressively became silent in most areas, though it still exists for some words in varieties of Andalusia and Extremadura. In several modern dialects, the sound [h] is the realization of the phoneme /χ/; additionally, in many dialects it exists as a result of the debuccalization of /s/ in syllabic coda (a process commonly termed *aspiration* in Hispanic linguistics).
- In the Americas, the Canary Islands, and almost all of Andalusia, the apical /ʂ/ merged with laminal /ʂ/ (the resulting phoneme is represented as /s/). In central and northern Spain, /ʂ/ shifted to /θ/, and the apicoalveolar sibilant /ʂ/ was preserved without change and so it can be represented phonemically as /s/).^[2] Some authors use the transcription /ʂ/ for /ʂ/ and/or /ʂ/ for /s/.
- Many dialects have lost the distinction between the phonemes /ʎ/ and /j/ in a merger, called *yeísmo*. Both phonemes have remained separate in parts of the Iberian Peninsula and in parts of South America, mainly in Bolivia, Paraguay, and Peru.

Grammar

- A readjustment of the second-person pronouns differentiates Modern Spanish from Old Spanish. To eliminate the ambiguity of the form *vos*, which served for both the second-person singular formal and the second-person plural, two alternative forms were created:
 - The form *usted* (<*vuesarced* <*vuestra merced*, 'your grace') as a form of respect in the second-person singular.
 - The form *vosotros* (<*vos otros*) as a usual form of second-person plural. In parts of Andalusia, in the Canary Islands, and in the Americas, however, the form did not take hold, and the form *ustedes* came to be used for both the formal and the informal second-person plural.^[3]
- The loss of the phoneme /ʒ/—through a merger with /ʃ/—caused the medieval forms *gelo*, *gela*, *gelos*, *gelas* (consisting of an indirect object followed by a direct object) to be reinterpreted as *se lo*, *se la*, *se los*, *se las*, as in *digelo* 'I gave it to him/her' > Early Modern Spanish *díselo* > Modern Spanish *se lo di*.
- In Early Modern Spanish, clitic pronouns were still often suffixed to a finite verb form, but they began to alternate with preverbal forms, as they do in Modern Spanish: *enfermóse* and *murióse* > *se enfermó* and *se murió*.

Spelling

Spelling in Early Modern Spanish was anarchic, unlike the Spanish of today, which is governed and standardized by the [Real Academia Española](#), a semi-governmental body. There was no reference book or other authority writers or [compositors](#) could turn to, to find the "correct" spelling of a word. In fact, spelling was not considered very important. Sometimes words were spelled according to their Latin origin, rather than their actual pronunciation (*trasumpto* instead of *trasunto*). That presents a challenge to modern editors of texts from the period, who are forced to choose what spelling(s) to use.^[1]

References

1. Eisenberg, Daniel (1990). "Cervantes' Consonants" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20180326180505/http://www.h-net.org:80/~cervantes/csa/articf90/consonan.htm>). *Cervantes, journal of the Cervantes Society of America*. **10** (2): 3–14. Archived from the original (<http://www.h-net.org:80/~cervantes/csa/articf90/consonan.htm>) on 2018-03-26.
2. J. I. Hualde, 2005, pp. 153–158
3. Jonge, Bob de (2005). "El desarrollo de las variantes de *vuestra merced a usted*" (<http://elies.ediris.es/elies22/cap7.htm>). *Estudios de Lingüística del Español* (in Spanish). **22**. sec. 7.3. ISSN 1139-8736 (<https://www.worldcat.org/issn/1139-8736>).

Further reading

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